



Al-Risala 1993

March

A new age in India

In a memoir titled 'The Muslim Role', (*The Times of India*, January 2, 1993) Chandra B Khanduri writes, 'Those who watched Maulana Azad on the eve of independence remember him weeping bitterly at the tragedy of partition.' Deeply shocked by India's partition, the Maulana was right in his conviction that this step would be fatal to the country; that it was tantamount to a new kind of destruction, which would forever bedevil India's new-found freedom.

This division of India was certainly against his better judgement, but eclipsed as he was as a leader by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he had little say in Muslim affairs at the national level prior to 1947. It ought to have been a different story when, with the sudden turn of events after 1947, he became a top-ranking leader with the entire Muslim population turning to him for guidance. But this leader, who had been so active in pre-independence days now lapsed into passivity. Giving his followers no clear guidelines which would have enabled them to come to grips with the change of circumstances. Even in the eleven years left to him after partition, he fell far short of becoming a true leader of his people.

Two other potential leaders, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Hifzur Rahman Seoharvi, fall into much the same category. The former lived on for ten years and the latter for fifteen years after partition. Without doubt their services in safeguarding Indian Muslims were of great value, but till the end of their lives, they failed to give a clear and positive lead to Muslims in terms of the change in their circumstances.

For instance, prior to partition, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Hifzur Rahman Seoharvi and, indeed, many others, maintained that the basis of a nation is its territory, that in effect a nation is a land: that is why Hindus and Muslims form one nation. But after 1947, they remained strangely silent on this point. No movement was ever subsequently launched by them to eliminate the growing separatist tendency arising from the notion that Hindus and Muslims formed two nations. They never strove to inculcate in Muslims the idea of their being part of the same nation as the Hindus, although this was the most vital task ahead of them in view of circumstances having altered so radically. Had they undertaken this task, they would have given a new and correct direction to the thinking of Indian Muslims, thus enabling them to make whatever adjustments were necessary to place their religious life in this country on a healthier footing.

As a result of the passivity of Maulana Azad and other like-minded public figures, the Muslims of the post-partition era continued to think along the lines laid down by Jinnah and supported by the poet Muhammad Iqbal. New leaders who thought differently did emerge later, but, lesser in stature, they were unable to rid Muslim thinking of the Jinnah-Iqbal dominance established in pre-independence days. For Muslims, post-partition conduct was and still is conditioned by that influence.

Jinnah and Muslims of his ilk had so instilled the two-nation theory into their followers that the idea of Hindus and Muslims being separate nations became a permanent mindset. This kept Muslims distanced from Hindus, except when their protests and demands brought them into confrontation with them. Prone to highlighting their problems, while glossing over their opportunities, Muslims came to know and use no other language but that of making demands.

The entire course of events in the post-partition era followed the path laid down by pre-partition leaders. Where Jinnah had presented a 14-point demand, the new leadership went a step further and presented a 20-point demand. Where Jinnah had talked of separate nationhood, the new leadership began to speak of a separate identity. Where Jinnah had held Hindus responsible for all of the Muslim afflictions, the new leaders held the government of the majority responsible for all Muslim afflictions. Where Jinnah had encouraged yellow journalism among Muslims, his successors stepped this activity up to fever pitch.

Thanks to Jinnah's misguided leadership Muslims came to regard Hindus, quite erroneously, as a separate nation. After 1947, in the absence of any real leadership, Muslims continued to think of Hindus as a separate nation, because Jinnah had dinned it into them that an India with two nations in it, although territorially common to both, could not be their motherland. Muslims continued more or less to think along these lines. Consciously or unconsciously, they continued to think of India as not being their actual homeland. In this way, Muslims living in their own homeland became, psychologically, homeless.

To my way of thinking, the present Muslim leadership, both religious and liberal, is, on almost all counts, an extension of Jinnah's style of leadership. Each leader in effect is only repeating what has already been said by Jinnah, and also by Iqbal who thought along the same lines. The only difference between those two leaders was their choice of rhetoric; the basic reality projected by them was identical.

Hindus Too

If we go deeper, we find that in actuality the Hindus too followed the Jinnah line. After 1947, they too subscribed to his way of thinking consciously or unconsciously, under his influence they came to regard India as being inhabited by two separate natives, Hindus and Muslims. This is the actual cause of the root which has set in in the Hindu-Muslim relationship.

We must bear in mind that until a very few years before the upheaval of partition, Muslims had thought of India as their homeland for the previous one thousand years.

Originally few in number, they have now increased their population to 15 crores. Who are these Muslims? The majority were formerly Hindus who came to accept Islam. That is to say that in respect of race, these Muslims are just as Indian as their Hindu counterparts.

Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru has made this point abundantly clear in his *Discovery of India*. He points out that for the last thousand years Hindus have never mentioned the thought that they alone were Indians, and that Muslims were not Indians. According to Hindu belief, truth is to be found in all religions. As

such when a Hindu embraced Islam, they thought, according to their belief, that he had left one fold to join another to attaining the same truth. Since in respect of lineage, he belonged to the same race, they never doubted his being an Indian.

A new age has set in India since Jinnah first presented his two nation theory in 1940, stressing that nationality related not to country but to religion and that since Hindus and Muslims had different religions, they were separate nations. It was on the basis of this two-nation theory that he demanded two separate homelands for both the communities in the sub-continent.

It was in response to Jinnah's propaganda that Hindus for the first time came to think of Muslims as being separate from themselves. The extremist among the Hindus now began to doubt the Muslims' loyalty to India. They began to call Muslims foreigners and this misnomer began to stick to them. Even the extraordinary sacrifices made by Brigadier Usman and Hawaldar Abdul Hameed in an offensive launched against Pakistan, a Muslim country, could not dispel the idea that Muslims were not loyal to India. This idea, stemming from Jinnah's thinking, could have been rooted out only by being countered by a strongly opposed school of thought. But no such powerful intellectual movement arose after 1947 as could have effectively dismantled Jinnah's philosophy.

The people of India have always believed that a nation is synonymous with a homeland. Those who belong to one land are one nation. But under the influence of the two-nation theory advocated by Jinnah, the Hindus came to believe that since the Hindus and Muslims had different religions, they were two distinctly separate nations.

About fifty percent of the Hindu-Muslim problem of India stems from the fact that even after the 1947 revolution, Indian Muslims remained under the influence of Jinnah's separatist theory. The other 50 per cent of the problem due to Hindus, at least in practice, having come to regard a nation as being based not on a homeland but on religion. Reasoned thus, Hindus and Muslims were separate nations. Jinnah himself might have been rejected, but this theory was definitely accepted.

For any intellectual revolution to be a success, circumstances must first be favourable. By the grace of God, after what happened on December 6, 1992, there could be no better set of circumstances than exists at present for the final erasure of Jinnah's pattern of thought. Without doubt the demolition of the Babri Masjid was a tragedy. But if this demolition brings with it the demolition of Jinnah's school of thought, I would regard that as the silver lining in this very dark cloud. Even this most unfavourable of incidents has begun to reveal its bright side.

After the second world war a movement arose in Japan, which came to be known as the 'reverse course.' Its aim was, firstly, to stop the Japanese carrying their pre-war thinking into the post-war era of defeat and allowing it to become a negative force which would hinder progress, and secondly, to replace such pre-war thinking with positive and constructive ideas. By God's grace, this process of reverse thinking has begun in India among both Hindus and Muslims.

The time has now come for us to make an all-out effort to convince Indian Muslims that Hindus and Muslims are one nation and not two, and that instead of hate, they must demonstrate their love. Muslims must be made to understand that instead of the policy of clash and confrontation, a policy of adjustment has to be adopted. They must be made aware that they have an equal share in the new India, but that it will be apportioned to them on the basis of merit and not on the basis of reservation and demand. We have also to bring into existence a new and constructive journalism – a journalism based on a just recording of events with the emphasis more on opportunities than on problems.

Such a movement must also be launched among the Hindus. Our Hindu brothers must break out of the mould of the Jinnah pattern of thinking and revert to their traditional philosophy. Instead of allowing themselves to be fettered by Jinnah's ideas, they should uphold the religion of their traditions, the most important aspect of which is to see unity in diversity. Mr. Khanduri rounds off his above article with these words: "In consonance with our composite culture, we need, therefore, to return to our traditional rationality and tolerance."

These words may have been penned by a single individual, but they express what is in the hearts of millions of Hindus – what in fact has been regularly highlighted after the December 6 incident by the press and the electronic media.

These words give voice to the conscience of the country. It is conscience, which, temporarily lulled before December 6, has been thoroughly awakened. And once the conscience of the people has been aroused, it will never sleep again until matters have been brought to a just conclusion. It is a matter of historical record that the voice of conscience comes to dominate all other voices. The Indian Conscience is no exception to this rule.

Ray of hope

The world beyond death is, as Arthur Koestler (1905-1983) put it an “unknown country”. We are all travelling towards that unknown country. The strangest and most mysterious event of our lives is death. Everyone is anxious to know what will become of him after death.

The American evangelist, Billy Graham, has written a book called *The Secret of Happiness*. He writes in this book that he once received an urgent message from a famous political leader, who wanted him to meet him at the earliest opportunity.

When Billy Graham reached the politician's residence, he was ushered into a separate room. There the politician addressed him in a heart-rending tone. “I am an old man,” he said, “life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?”

It was, indeed, only a man of religion who could give him an answer?

Death is lying in wait for everyone. In one's youth one tends to forget death, but in the end the hand of fate holds sway. In old age, when one's strength is on the wane, one realizes the imminence of death; one is moved to wonder what lies in store for one in the hereafter; one searches for a ray of hope which can illuminate the world one will have to face after death.

It is this ray of hope that God's prophets have come to the world to provide. The prophets have taught man that there is another world – one that is both eternal and ideal – after death. Those who will be admitted to this perfect world in the afterlife are those who, in this life on earth, prove themselves worthy of it by their righteous actions. This message has been summed in these words of the Quran:

“And God calls unto the home of peace.” (Qur'an, 10:25)

Wonders of nature

God send down water from the sky,
bringing forth gardens of delight.
Try as you may,
you cannot cause such trees to grow.

(Qur'an 27 :60)

Trees are vital to the existence of human beings. In a treeless world any form of human or animal life would be well-nigh impossible, quite apart from any consideration of aesthetic appeal. Trees absorb noise, give off precious oxygen, clean the air of pollution, reduce glare, act as coolers and air conditioners and also serve as emotional tranquillisers – trees are vital in any city, howsoever developed it may be.

In hospitals, schools, prisons, and drug rehabilitation centres, it has been found that trees act as a form of therapy, helping to heal mental, physical and social disabilities, where trees have been properly landscaped and planted with an eye to beauty of form, colour and denseness, they can ease stress, contribute to healing and provide an environment where relaxation is possible.

"Plants," say an eminent horticulturist, "are non-threatening and non-discriminating. They respond not to race, intellect, wealth or physical capacity but to the care given to them. Plants ease anxiety and tension, give a sense of tranquility."

Experts tell us that trees can lower blood pressure, change blood sugar levels, bring peace and tranquility to troubled hearts. A beautiful landscape, a wooded park, can do more for the human soul than all the chemical tranquillisers in the world.

Nature speaks

The second International Neem Conference was held in West Germany in December 1983. Over one hundred delegates participated in this conference. The Neem tree came into sharp focus in the context of the adverse effect of man-made chemical insecticides. It is a principal source of inexpensive natural repellent and causes no environmental damage.

A noted animal physiologist, Dr. L.M. Schoonhoven, of the agricultural University at Wageningen in Holland, said that the unique defence system in the neem provided a rare opportunity for insect control. Experiments held in Togo, Africa, had showed that neem leaves, worked into the soil, reduced the population of the plant parasitic nematodes and promoted "spectacular increase" in crop yield.

Now the question arises, what exactly enabled the neem tree to survive, perhaps for millions of years, in all world of greedy insects? And what enabled it to provide protection to the rest of the biological world?

The reason given at the International Neem Conference was that the tree has developed, over the ages, a strong and steady chemical defence system, which enabled it to thwart the heavy selection pressure exerted by insects.

According to this explanation, it is a blind evolutionary process, which has produced this unique quality in the neem tree. What man could not achieve after a long period of consistent effort, the tree evolved automatically.

Man is an intelligent being, with will power and consciousness of his own; but in spite of this he is finding great difficulty in producing chemical compounds, which will kill only harmful insects, without adversely affecting man and other living creatures.

How strange it is then that the neem tree, which is not only ignorant of other living beings, but also unaware of its own 'problems, has succeeded in developing this defence system for insect control that causes no damage to man or other living creatures.

This fact shows that a more intelligent and Powerful Being exists in the universe. This unique quality of the neem does nothing to prove that everything has developed as a result of a blind evolutionary process. Rather, it serves as an incontrovertible proof of the existence of God; for only All Knowing and All-Powerful Being could have invested an unknowing plant with such magic and far-seeing properties.

11 March 1993

Spending for the cause of Islam in times of distress

When Abu Bakr first became a Muslim, he possessed forty thousand dirhams, all of which wealth he devoted to the cause of Islam. At that time Islam was going through a difficult period. For this reason the Prophet said: "No one's wealth has benefitted me so much as Abu Bakr's."(As related by Hesham ibn. Urwah who heard this from his father.)

11 March 1993

Thrift, even in the midst of plenty

The Prophet once passed by Saad while the latter was pouring water over himself from a large vessel to perform his ablution. "What is this extravagance, O Saad?" said the Prophet. "Prophet of God:" said Saad, "Can there be extravagance even in one's ablutions?" "Yes indeed," replied the Prophet, "even if you are standing on the banks of a river."

(Ahmad. *Musnad*)

Preaching of Islam

After their victory in the Crusades, the Muslims were in a position of dominance; but Islam was not able to spread in Europe by virtue of that domination. The bitter memory of their defeat at the hands of the Muslims had made Europeans averse to Islam. The prejudice and antagonism left by the Crusades now blocked the way to the spread of Islam in Europe.

When European nations later emerged as colonial powers, however, this hostility mellowed. The defeat of the Crusade was now avenged. A large portion of the Muslim world came – directly or indirectly – under European rule.

Defeated nations hold grudges against the other party. For this reason they are not willing to accept anything that their rivals have to offer them. Victorious nations, on the other hand, are self-sufficient. No psychological barrier prevents them from accepting anything that the other party has to offer them. With the colonial period, then, came great new opportunities for the spread of Islam in Europe. Preaching Islam in a defeated Europe was a hard task, but preaching it in a victorious Europe was relatively easy.

But now another obstacle came in the way. The resentment that was previously felt by Europeans was now felt by Muslims. In the colonial period, Europe achieved political and cultural ascendancy over the Muslim world. This made Muslims bitterly antagonistic towards Europe; it made Muslims look at Europe as their material enemies and national rivals; it made them view Europeans with hostility instead of sympathy. The result was that the message of Islam could not be communicated to Europeans in the colonial period either. For the word of God to be conveyed to other nations, a preacher/congregation relationship has to exist between Muslims and other people. Such a relationship was never able to develop between Muslims and Europeans, for one reason in the past and for a different reason now.

Now is the time then to end the political and economic rivalry that exists between Muslims and other nations. Only if Muslims cease to think in a worldly way will an atmosphere conducive to proselytization come into existence. What they must do is think on a divine level, for God has entrusted them with the propagation of His word. Only when they do so will they realize the importance of relinquishing the worldly rivalry that exists between them and other nations.

13 March 1993

RISING ABOVE LOVE AND HATE IN ONE'S DEALINGS

When the Prophet emigrated from Makkah, the keys of the Ka'aba were with Uthman Ibn Talha. They had been in his family since ancient times. Before the emigration, the Prophet had asked Uthman for the keys, and Uthman had refused to hand them over. Furthermore, he spoke abusively to the Prophet. The Prophet bore all his rude remarks. All he said in reply was: "Uthman, perhaps you will see that one day I will have these keys in my hands. I will have the power to dispose of them as I will." "It will be a day of disgrace and woe for the Quraysh when the keys of the Ka'aba are handed over to one like you," Uthman retorted. After the Conquest of Makkah, the Prophet reigned supreme. He asked for the keys of the Ka'aba, and was holding them in his hand when his cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, stood up and asked for them to be handed over to him. The Prophet did not reply to Ali, and asked where Uthman ibn Talha was. When he came forward, the Prophet said to him: "Uthman, here are your keys; this is a day of righteousness and fulfillment of promises.

Worthy of dependence

On September 15, 1983, the Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, finally announced his resignation. He had held the reins of power in Israel for six years. At the time of his resignation, Mr. Begin was so dispirited that he had gone into total hiding, refusing to meet reporters and remaining totally uninterested in the political issues of the day. He did not even personally visit the President of Israel, Mr. Herzog, to deliver his resignation.

Menachem Begin, who won fame as leader of the underground terrorist organization, Irgur, was thought of as a man of iron. Many political observers in Jerusalem consider it inconceivable that a man of Begin's drive and determination should leave office while Israeli troops are still in the Lebanon, the colonization of the West Bank is still uncompleted and the economy is falling apart. As one well-placed diplomatic source in Jerusalem put it: "Mr. Begin is just not the sort of man to walk away from Israel's problems at this difficult stage in the country's development. He has just turned 70 and it is an age when serving politicians fix their eyes on their place in history."

Why, at such a delicate time, has Mr. Begin decided to resign? The main reason appears to have been the personal tragedy, which struck him last autumn-the death of his wife, whom he married in Poland in 1939 and who remained the object of his lifelong devotion. "The news of her death," James Macmanus writes in the *Guardian Weekly* (September 4, 1983) "was broken to Mr. Begin on board a plane flying across the United States. Those on the flight recall the ghastly pallor that replaced the Prime Minister's usually ruddy complexion and their fear that he was going to have another heart-attack." So great was the Prime Minister's sorrow that, when the American ambassador to Israel, Samuel Lewis visited him a few weeks before his resignation, he found the prime minister deeply depressed and almost totally uninterested in the political issues of the day. The diplomat exclaimed afterwards, to Mr. Begin's aides: "Why is it impossible to get him out of this mood?" The only reply he received was that the prime minister appeared to be suffering from incurable sorrow.

Man instinctively needs some point on which to focus his emotions. This feeling is present in every human being; no one can take it away from him. If one makes God the focal point of one's emotions, one will never despair or become dispirited, for God is eternal. If, on the other hand, one concentrates one's feelings on something else besides God, one will not be able to avoid despair and depression. All things besides God will perish. Sooner or later, they will desert man. Those who concentrate their feelings on God are grasping a firm handle that will never break. But those who attach themselves to other things besides God, are grasping a handle which one day will slip from their hands, for everything other than God is mortal. When this happens one will be left in the state of sorrow and remorse that we witness in Mr. Begin's case.

15 March 1993

Things asked for and things given freely are in two separate categories

The Prophet sent a gift to Umer, which he returned. Asked by the Prophet why he had done so, Umer replied: "Messenger of God, did you not tell us that we had best not take anything from anyone?" The Prophet then explained, "That is when you ask for something. When you have not asked for anything, what you receive is God's bounty." Umer then swore an oath: "By the one who has control over my soul, never will I ask anyone for a single thing. But if something is given to me without my asking, I shall not refuse it."

(Malik, *Muwatta*)

On seeing prayer

Henry de Castro was a French officer, who, during the French occupation of Algeria held a high Government post. One day he was riding out on a mission through the desert. Behind him were thirty Arab horsemen who served under him. During the journey the time came for the afternoon prayer. They told their officer that it was time for prayer, and without waiting for his permission, they dismounted. After giving the call to prayer aloud they stood in rows to pray. The French officer felt affronted at this arrogant behaviour on their part, but he kept silent. He stopped his horse and observed the Arabs in their prayer. The sight of praying in even rows had a profound effect on him. Afterwards when they had finished praying, he began to ask them questions about prayer, and listened attentively to their answers.

The boldness of the Arabs and the sight of prayer in such array made a deep impression on Henry de Castro. When he returned home he started to study Islam. First of all he read a French translation of the Qur'an. Then he traveled extensively in Arab countries to observe the Islamic way of life, his impressions became more and more profound. Eventually he accepted Islam.

Thereafter he wrote a book in French on how he had come to accept Islam. This book was translated into Arabic by the famous Egyptian writer, Fathi Zaghlul. It was published under the title of *Al-Islam: Khawatir wa Sawanih*.

At first the French officer thought that the Arabs were being proud in their action, so he felt offended; but when he saw them dismount from their horses in order to bow down humbly before the Lord of the Universe, he realized that what they had done had been out of humility, not pride. His true nature awakened within him. The sight of God's servants bowing down before Him so inspired a feeling of submission to God within him, that eventually he entered the fold of the religion of God.

17 March 1993

The ascendancy of Islamic thought

Among the prophecies in the New Testament regarding the coming of the Prophet of Islam is this one:

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword that with it he should smite nations. (Revelation, 19: 15)

This means that the religion of the Final Prophet will be supported by the sword of words, not the sword of iron; it will be the ideological ascendancy of Islam which will vanquish nations; the strength of the Prophet of Islam will be words which man utters rather than metals which are extracted from the earth.

This is a great prophecy. It means that the followers of the Final Prophet will never be defenseless or empty-handed. They will, potentially, have supreme might at their command, even when they seem powerless. The secret of the strength of Islam is the ascendancy of its thought, and that is something, which can never be taken away from it.

This prophecy was fulfilled entirely during the Prophet's life. The Word of God that was revealed to him had taken most of the known world by storm. Today also the power of the word of God can work wonders, on the condition that the followers of the Prophet convey it as he and his companions did.

Historical Prophet

I have accepted Islam in all sincerity and earnestness, and the first reason that has moved me to do so is its solid historical groundwork. After wandering helplessly for several years in the marshy bogs of divergent creeds and conflicting systems of philosophy, my weary soul has at last found refuge and consolation in a religion based on a Revelation that has remained unaltered ever since its first compilation under the third Caliph, and in a prophet whose historical personality is not only unquestionable but about whose youth, appearance, daily habits and even personal characteristics we know almost as much as we do about those of Oliver Cromwell or of Napoleon Bonaparte. You cannot throw even the least shadow of doubt on the historical basis of that immense personality that has stamped itself so deep on the roll of time as to make Christendom grow pale before that august and illustrious name even to this day.

In the Prophet of Islam there is nothing vague and shadowy, mythical or mysterious, as, for instance, in Zoroaster and Srikrishna, or in Buddha and Christ. The very existence of those prophets has been seriously doubted and even totally denied; but nobody, as far as I am aware, has ever ventured to reduce the prophet of Islam either into a "solar myth" or into a "fairy tale" as some eminent savants of Europe have done with Buddha and Christ.

Oh! what a relief to find, after all, a truly historical prophet to believe in.

From "Why Have I Accepted Islam?" A lecture delivered on the 26th August 1904, in Hyderabad, by Dr. Nishikant Chattpadhyaya.

Qur'an The preserved book of God

The fifth Surah of the Qur'an states:

Today I have concluded for you your religion, and I have completed my favour upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion. (5:3)

Some people have taken this verse to mean that previous religions were incomplete, and that they were only made complete with the religion of the final Prophet, Muhammad, on whom be peace. But this interpretation is mistaken. By 'conclusion of religion' in this verse is meant conclusion of the Book of God, which had been revealed, to Prophet Muhammad over a period of 23 years. This is the last verse of the Qur'an to be revealed and marks the completion to the Book of God in Arabic. The meaning of this verse is not that the religion, which God had been sending down since the beginning of human history, had gradually been developing and had now taken on its final and complete form. It is the revolutionary completion of the Qur'an in Arabic that is referred to, not the evolutionary completion of divine religion as a whole.

There is, essentially, one Book of divine guidance. That Book has been called *Ummul Kitab* (The Essence of the Book) in the Qur'an. The divine scriptures were editions of this *Ummul Kitab*, revealed to the different Prophets. The difference between one Scripture and another is one of language and style. There is no question of one Scripture being complete and another incomplete.

After the final Prophet, however, the only way to salvation is by means of the Qur'an and Islam. Following previous scriptures and religions cannot now earn one salvation. But there is only one reason for this: the fact that the Qur'an is preserved in its original form whereas other religions are not.

The Qur'an still exists as it was revealed, but previous Scriptures have been altered and are not now as they originally were. This difference between the Qur'an and other Scriptures is a historical fact that cannot be doubted on any academic grounds. Clearly, only that edition of the Book of God, which exists in its original form, will be a source of guidance and salvation for man. Scriptures, which have been altered by man – which do not even exist in their original form – will never be able to provide man with guidance and salvation.

How was it that the Qur'an was preserved whereas previous Scriptures were not? The only reason for this was that in this world a powerful community is required to preserve the Book of God – a community that is able to ward off every threat to the integrity of the Scriptures. The Qur'an was the only divine Scripture to bring about a revolution of such universal proportions that a large community gathered around it – a community that was strong enough to ensure that the Book of God was preserved in its original form.

The scale of the revolution, which the Qur'an brought about, was unprecedented in human history. During the Prophet's lifetime Islam had spread throughout the Arabian peninsula. Within one hundred years of the Prophet's death his followers had subdued most of the inhabited world. The enemies of monotheism were – on a universal level – either obliterated or vanquished.

Islam continued to dominate the world scene, until eventually man entered the age of the press. Now, there was no possibility of any changes or additions being made in the Book of God. The task of preservation of the Qur'an had been accomplished for all time.

Second thoughts

Galileo (1564-1642) was the great Italian scientist who founded dynamics. It was he who first discovered the importance of acceleration and established the law of falling bodies. He was also one of the first to construct a telescope with which he made several important discoveries. Three hundred and fifty years ago he wrote a book entitled *Dialogue Concerning Two Chief World Systems – Ptolemaic and Copernican*, in which he discussed the two theories concerning our planetary system. In this book he supported Copernicus in his theory that the earth is round, not flat, and that the earth revolves around the sun, rather than the sun around the earth.

The Roman Church considered this theory to be against Christian doctrine. It is not included in either the Old or the New Testament that the sun revolves around the earth: this theory had only been included in the expositions of Christian doctrine compiled by saints on their own. Since the church believed that the saints' explanations of the Scriptures were as holy as the Scriptures themselves, it declared Galileo a heretic.

The Church had so much power in those days that it set up parallel ecclesiastical courts in various Catholic countries of the European continent, notably Spain and Italy. Galileo's case was brought before an ecclesiastical court, which sentenced him to life imprisonment. This put an end to science in Italy for many centuries. This was the dire consequence of considering the saints' expositions as holy as the divine text.

The Church was able to suppress some scholars, but it was not able to suppress knowledge itself. The scope of the Church's power was limited, whereas knowledge knows no bounds: its roots are spread throughout the universe. The Church's antagonism could not prevent knowledge from growing. Eventually knowledge gained all round ascendancy over the Church. The power of Rome became past history.

Now the Church had no choice but to accept the new situation, Galileo, whom it had condemned as an apostate, came to be acknowledged as a hero in intellectual circles throughout the world. This episode turned into a stain in the Church's history, a symbol of its unscientific attitude. The Church now had to face the issue, which Galileo had faced before. There was no way the church could restore its integrity without acknowledging Galileo's intellectual status.

In 1980 a special commission consisting of eight members – mathematicians, theologians, and historians – sat to reconsider the question of the earth's position in the solar system. After discussing all the issues at length, the commission agreed that science had conclusively proved that the earth revolves around the sun, and that, without doubt, Galileo had been in the right.

Then, in May 1983, a special meeting was held in the Vatican attended by a large number of historians, Catholic theologians and scientists. Pope John Paul II himself presided over this historic meeting. The Pontiff openly admitted the Church's error and declared Galileo right. He went on to say that, "The Church's experience, during the Galileo affair and after it, has led to a more mature attitude and to a more accurate grasp of the authority proper to her." (*Guardian Weekly*, July 29, 1983).

What was the reason for the Christian Church's denial of Galileo in the 17th century and recognition of him in the 20th? The reason was that in the 17th century Galileo was a controversial figure, whereas in the 20th century he has become an established one.

Similarly, the Church has had to deal with another figure: the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him. In the 7th century, the Church denied Muhammad. The reason for this was that at that time Muhammad was a controversial figure. But now, by the 20th century, he too has become established. So much scientific and historical evidence has accumulated in support of his prophethood that there are no realistic grounds for denying it (See *The Bible, the Qur'an, and Science*, by Maurice Bucaille).

Then why have the same reasons, which led the Church to acknowledge Galileo failed to make it acknowledge Muhammad? The reason is the different nature of the two figures.

Galileo was an astronomer; his case was one of astronomical learning. But Muhammad was a prophet; his case was one of divine revelation. This explains the different nature of the two cases. To acknowledge Galileo is to acknowledge a scientific truth alone, whereas to acknowledge Muhammad is to acknowledge a religious truth. For the Church, recognition of Galileo's findings was recognition of an external event, which did not affect it in any way. Its own particular structure continued to function as usual. But to accept the prophethood of Muhammad is an event, which is directly connected with the structure of the Church. The truth of the matter is that by accepting Muhammad, popedom forfeits its right to exist; the whole edifice of Catholicism falls to the ground.

The Prophet Muhammad taught monotheism, whereas the whole structure of the Church today is based on the doctrine of the Trinity. Muhammad taught that Christ was God's Prophet, whereas the Church has built its creed around the belief that he was the son of God. Muhammad made personal actions the basis of salvation, whereas the Church bases salvation on the doctrine of atonement.

Recognition of Galileo has not changed the Church's religious position. But if the Church were to recognize Muhammad, it would have to deny its position as upholder of the true religion and who is ready to recognize others when that entails denying oneself?

Belief in God

God is the source of all goodness. He can be seen everywhere in the universe. His power is evident in the form of light and heat. He converts matter into greenery and flowing water. His glory is made manifest in colour, taste and fragrance. Motion and magnetism are evidence of His strength.

Belief in a God of such- perfection is more than just a dogma. It illuminates man's soul and enraptures his heart. If one relishes a delicious fruit, and goes into ecstasy on hearing a tuneful melody, how then can one fail to be moved by the discovery of God, who is the fountain-head of all goodness.

When one truly discovers God, He becomes like a fragrance which one savours, a delicious taste which one relishes, a spectacle, which captivates one's vision, a melody that never ceases to thrill. God has created all these exquisite delights: His being is their treasure house. Drawing close, to God is like entering paradise. It is like dwelling in a garden of exquisite beauty and fragrance, or being in the neighbourhood of the source of all light.

24 March 1993

The right of others to one's property:

According to Jaadah, the Prophet, on seeing an extremely fat man, laid his finger on the man's stomach and said: "If what is in excess there lay in someone else's stomach, you would be the better for it."

(Al-Tabarani)

From denial to belief

Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe is a Sri Lankan scientist, who heads the department of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at the university College, Cardiff, in Wales. He has been conducting research into the origin of life since 1962 in the company of an eminent English scientist, Professor Sir Fred Hoyle. The results of their research have been published in the form of a book entitled *Evolution from Space*.

When the two scientists commenced their research they were both agreed on one point: that the notion of a Creator is inconsistent with science. But they were so shocked by the final result of their research that they had to revise their thinking. "From my earliest training as a scientist," Wickramasinghe says, "I was very strongly brainwashed to believe that science cannot be consistent with any kind of deliberate creation. That notion has had to be very painfully shed. I am quite uncomfortable in the situation – the state of mind I now find myself in. But there is no logical way out of it."

Both scientists made separate calculations into the mathematical chances of life having begun on earth spontaneously. Independently, they both arrived at the same conclusion: that the odds against life having ignited accidentally on earth were staggering. In mathematical jargon 10 to the power of 40,000. Add 40,000 noughts to the figure 1 and you have the figure. "That number is such an imponderable in the universe that I am 100 per cent certain that life could not have started spontaneously on Earth," says Wickramasinghe.

As they write in their book: Once we saw that the probability of life originating at random is so utterly minuscule as to make it absurd, it became sensible to think that the properties of physics on which life depends are in every respect deliberate."

"Sir Frederick Hoyle was tending much more than I towards the higher intelligence Creator," Wickramasinghe explains. "I used to argue against it, but I found myself losing every argument. At the moment I can't find any rational argument to knock down the view, which argues for conversion to God. If I could have found an argument – even a flimsy one – I would not have been a party to what we wrote in the book. We used to have open minds; now we realize that the only logical answer to life is creation, and not accidental shuffling. I still hope that one day I may go back to favour purely mechanistic explanation – I say 'hope', because I still cannot come to terms with my conversion."

"My being a Buddhist-albeit not an ardent one – was never a problem, because it is an atheistic religion which does not profess to know anything about creation and does not have a creator built into it. But I now find myself driven to this position by logic. There is no other way in which we can understand the precise ordering of the chemicals of the universe except to invoke creation on a cosmic scale."

Until recently, belief in God was considered to be just a personal creed, not backed up by rational thought. In recent decades, however, the situation has changed. New evidence has again and again come to light, which makes belief in God a scientifically credible concept, rather than just a personally desirable creed.

Science impresses on man the abstract reality of God's existence. But if there is a God, then what should man's relationship with Him be? Science does not, and can not, answer this question. This is a question that can only be answered by religion.

Basically every religion answers this question. But it is clear from the present state of religions that besides Islam – no other religion is preserved in its original form. Some religions are rendered false by their not having a concept of God. Some say that there are many gods, but science does not back up this belief: all branches of science and knowledge are agreed on the fact that, if there is a God, it must be one God, not several. Some religions have been pervaded by ideas, which the human conscience can never accept – ideas like bias on the basis of colour and race.

Just as science brings one to belief in God, it also brings one to belief in Islam, for Islam is the only religion consistent with scientific facts. Science shows that the universe has a God; this fact in itself is enough to prove agnostic religions wrong. Study of cosmos shows that it operates in unity and harmony; this shows that there must be one God, as Islam teaches, not many gods, as other religions claim. No religion, except Islam, presents a true concept of God. No religion tells man what his relationship with God should be.

27 March 1993

A good deed is of no value if it makes one proud

Ibn Ataullah As Sikandari wrote in his book, *Al-Hikam*: “A sin which makes one meek and humble is better than a good deed which makes one proud and arrogant.”

27 March 1993

Of all actions, the most sublime is remembrance of God

Abu Darda reports the Prophet as asking his companions: "Should I not tell you of the action that is best and most pure in the presence of your Lord; the action which will raise you up in the sight of God, and is better for you than great expenditure of gold and silver; better too than that you should meet your enemies in battle, striking their necks and they striking yours?" "Do tell us," the Companions replied, "It is remembrance of God," said the Prophet.

(Al-Tirmidhi, *Shama'il*)

Man's true purpose in life

Man attains his highest distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. Such a life characterises the most advanced stage of human development. This does not mean that by taking up just any task, which is apparently, significant man's life becomes truly purposeful. A really purposeful life is one in which man discovers his supreme status; a life in which his personality makes manifest its unique distinctive quality. An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better country when the season changes; a wasp busies itself building up its own home from tiny particles of earth; a herd of deer takes measures to protect itself from wild beasts of prey. All of these appear to be purposeful actions. But when the phrase 'a purposeful life' is applied to man, then it does not refer to efforts of this nature. Without doubt arranging for one's food, clothes and habitation are surely of the tasks that man has to perform in this world; but this is a level of purposefulness in which men and animals, being concerned only with bare survival, are equal. Its true application in relation to man can only be one in which he appears in all his dignity. Man's life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism.

God's creations in this world fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animate objects enjoy a certain superiority over inanimate objects. The former can be divided into three classes: the vegetable, the animal and the human. Modern scientific research has shown that plants also possess life, in that they nourish themselves, they grow and they have feelings.

But animals and men surely represent a higher form of life. In what way does man excel animals? Many theories have been advanced in answer to this question over the ages, and great minds are still studying it. But modern biologist have come to the conclusion that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought, which distinguishes him from other life-forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms all plan of action in his mind; in his everyday life his actions are determined by himself. Whereas this is not the case with animals. Though many of their actions appear to be like those of men, they are not the result of thought; they all stem from pure instinct. Animals are simply led intuitively by their desires and their needs in certain direction. Their actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

It is in this unique conceptual quality of man that we can conceive of what his higher purpose in life should be. The latter can only be one, which does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exigencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God.

Man's true purpose in life can only be one, which reflects the higher side of his personality; one, which displays him as the superior being, he is.

If one pauses at this stage to take note of what the Qur'an has to say, one will find that it gives us clear guidance in this matter. Man's purpose in life has been explained in the Qur'an in the following words:

I created mankind and the Jinn that they might worship me. I demand no livelihood of them, nor do I ask that they should feed me. God alone is the Munificent Giver, the Mighty One, the Invincible. (51:53)

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship.

This is a purpose which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. It raises man to a much higher plane than that of animals. Not a trace of animalism contributes to the achievement of such a goal. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse states, rather He himself is responsible of your livelihood. This means that worship of God is a purpose, which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The motive force towards the fulfillment of this purpose is not the urge to satisfy one's needs or those of others. The worshipper seeks neither to gratify his own desires nor those of the Being he worships. It is purpose which sets before man a goal far above all these things – a goal which does not follow internal needs or external pressures, but results purely from conceptual thought.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But a life of this nature cannot be called a purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. It might seem as if they are the result of deliberation, but if one looks at the matter in depth, one will see that in actual fact the motive force behind these actions is the same urge that motivates an animal in various ways, its concern for its own survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs, and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations, which, in fact, guide a person in his search for his livelihood.

When man grows up, he realizes that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live; he requires a reliable source of income to sustain him throughout his life. He is forced by these considerations to obtain these things. Then he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn to a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is being guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status in this world. For this reason these activities cannot be considered as

being directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

Man's greater dignity can be based only on a purpose, which emanates from inner desires and pressures of environment. Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is a purpose loftier than the one towards which an animal directs its energies. It distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one, which is in accordance with man's unique status; it must be one, which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature.

31 March 1993

Building more for the hereafter than for this world

A Muslim of Medina had just built himself a house, and was spreading mud on the roof when the Prophet passed by. "What are you doing?" the Prophet asked him. "Applying some mud," came the reply, to which the Prophet said: "The Hour is nigh; closer than that which you apply."